Immunotherapy (Allergy Shots) 
Information for Patients

Allergy Shots

Immunotherapy or “allergy shots” are administered only to allergic patients who have severe 
symptoms not controlled by environmental control measures or medications, or which persist 
and require daily medications. Immunotherapy is also given to patients who have life threatening 
reactions to insect stings.

Effectiveness

Immunotherapy or “allergy shots” are very effective, because they “turn down” allergic reactions 
to common pollens, molds, and dust. The treatment consists of giving people increasing doses of 
the allergens to which they react. The treatment is divided into 2 phases: the build-up phase and 
the maintenance phase. During the build up phase, a person’s allergic sensitivity is gradually 
decreased by administering very small amounts of the allergens in increasing doses. This phase 
takes approximately 6-12 months to complete and requires the patient to come weekly. Once the 
patient has achieved the maximum dose, the patient enters the maintenance phase. This phase 
lasts 2-3 years and the interval between patient visits is spread out to between 2-4 weeks, 
depending on a patient’s allergic sensitivity. The injections do not cure patients but diminish 
sensitivities, resulting in fewer symptoms and use of fewer medications. It is important to 
maintain shots at the proper time interval; missing shots for a short vacation or for some other 
problem is acceptable with appropriate regulation of the resumption dosage.
How long are the shots given?

The goal of the maintenance schedule is to increase the interval between shots to 2-4 weeks depending on a patient’s allergic sensitivities. After obtaining good results for 3 years, the shots may be discontinued for 6-12 months. Some patients will continue to do well and some will have slight increase in symptoms, which are controllable with medications; some will require resumption of allergy injections. Patients will be re-evaluated periodically while on injections; changes in the allergy extract or injection schedule may be necessary to obtain the best results.

Reactions

In general, allergy shots are very effective and well tolerated, however there are risks associated with getting them. Since a patient is being given the substance that he/she is allergic to, he/she may experience an allergic reaction. A patient can get either a local reaction or a systemic (full body) reaction.

Local reactions are common and include itching, redness, discomfort, and/or swelling at the site of the allergy injection. If this occurs, let the allergy injection nurse know, especially if the swelling is excessive or lasts more than 24 hours.

Systemic reactions are less common. Systemic reactions can be mild and include nasal congestion, sneezing, or itching of the ears, mouth, and throat. Systemic reactions may be more severe however, and include symptoms of rash, hives, wheezing, difficulty breathing, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, fainting, a sense of feeling dizzy or shock. The risk of these more severe reactions is 2.1%. Most of the time these reactions will occur within the first 20-30 minutes after receiving the shot. On rare occasions, the reactions can occur after that time period. If a reaction happens after that time period you must go to the nearest emergency room. If a patient notices these symptoms, he/she should notify the allergy injection nurse immediately. Prompt medical attention is necessary to assist the person as severe reactions can be life threatening or fatal.

In order to evaluate and treat reactions promptly, we require that you wait in the Allergy Clinic for a full 30 minutes after receiving your injections.

Please note that if you engage in exercise after receiving your shots, you have a higher risk of having a reaction. You should wait several hours after your shots before you exercise.

Allergy shots may need to be postponed if you are sick or if your asthma symptoms are worse than usual. Please call if you have any questions about your asthma or your health as it related to your allergy injection schedule. Our allergy nurse specialist’s number is 415-353-2853.
Nuts and Bolts

Allergy shot patients do not need to make an appointment for their shots. The allergy shot clinic hours are Monday 2:00-5:30 pm, Wednesday 8:00 am-12:00 noon, and Thursday 12:00-4:30 pm. Please observe the posted hours as we are unable to extend these hours. Occasionally we must change these hours due to holidays, etc. We will post these changes in the clinic at least two weeks prior to the change.

When you arrive at the clinic, please sign in on the shot sign-in log in the Allergy Faculty Practice. Patients are called in the order that they have signed in. Once you have received your injection, you will receive an encounter form and will be instructed to take it to the front desk for check in and payment of any fees. Again, it is ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY TO REMAIN IN THE WAITING AREA FOR 30 minutes. After the 30 minute period you will return to the allergy nurse specialist so that he/she can note the reaction from the shot and can collect your encounter form.

Patient Responsibilities

It is a patient’s responsibility to notify the allergy nurse specialist or MD if there have been any changes in his/her medical condition or if new blood pressure medications have been added. THERE ARE CERTAIN BLOOD PRESSURE MEDICATIONS (beta-blockers such as atenolol, metoprolol) WHICH INCREASE THE LIKELIHOOD OF A SEVERE SYSTEMIC REACTION TO ALLERGY SHOTS.

The patient must observe the 30 minute waiting period after receiving allergy shots. If a reaction occurs after the 30 minute waiting period, the patient must proceed to the nearest emergency room.

If there are urgent questions about allergy injections, reactions, or asthma the patient must call the physician. To reach the on-call physician, call 415-353-2725, and follow the instructions for contacting the on-call physician.

The patient must schedule an annual follow-up visit with his/her allergy physician. Some patients may need more frequent follow-up depending on their underlying conditions.

Contact Information

Allergy nurse specialist (Glenna Mote-Yates): 415-353-2853

Allergy MD on call: 415-353-2725, and follow instructions for contacting the on-call physician.